

1986-1996: Anarchism in Turkey

A brief history of the still-young anarchist movement in Turkey.

The anarchist movement came to the political scene of Turkey not very many years ago. The publication of Kara a monthly magazine, was the starting point of anarchism in Turkey in 1986. Before the publication of this monthly magazine, there had not been any anarchist periodical or any anarchist circle which attempted to express itself. Of course that does not mean that there haven't been any anarchists in the Geo-political borders of Turkey. An important point to note is that before Kara, anarchist circles or individuals never tried to become a political movement in Turkey.

Although the organised working class movement and revolutionary movements have existed for 70 years in Turkey, anarchism has not been seen as a political factor in Turkey. And this fact should be questioned. Why has nearly every kind of Western originated revolutionary movement taken its place in the political arena of Turkey, and not anarchism? Moreover we should search for and discuss the reasons for that fact.

The incorrigible progressiveness of Marxism

Revolutionary movements in Turkey have been dominated by Marxism. The reason for this domination must be found in the history of Turkey. The Republic of Turkey and its past Ottoman Empire's last hundred years was mainly dominated by a vital problem. That is the problem of modernisation and westernisation. The undeniable power and influence of western imperialism and the weakness of the Ottoman State (and later the Republic of Turkey) has put the question of modernisation and westernisation in front of the ruling elite and the intelligentsia of the country. In other words, the argument is that Turkey, in order to be a power and independent should break away from its traditions and it should become an industrialised and socially westernised country. That is the project which has always been shared by nearly all the political sides in Turkey. (Except radical Islamist groups who were against any kind of break away from traditions)

Moreover positivism was the philosophy behind this project. As it is known, positivism came to being in the west as the ideology of progress and development in the middle of 19th century. And Marxism is partially under the influence of that ideology. Turkish Marxists never attempted to separate themselves from that ideology till the late 1970's. Thus Marxists shared the dominant philosophy of the general Turkish intelligentsia.

Anarchism was born a part of the western and modern world, yet at the same time it is a denial of these things. In this context, anarchism as a denial of modernity and western domination is hardly the solution for the intelligentsia and the politicians of Turkey.

The other reason why anarchism has developed late in Turkey lies in the fact that the intelligentsia and political elite (left wings or right wings) of Turkey has needed a strong State to implement its modernisation and westernisation project. And one can easily think that anarchism is not an answer to their needs.

Why anarchism appeared in 1980's

The fact that anarchism came into being so late in Turkey may be partially explained by saying that modernist and westernised ideology was weakened in the 1980's. Yet this can not be whole explanation. One should look at the problem in its historical context. As we have said before, Marxism was the dominant ideology in Turkey's revolutionary movements. In the 1980's Marxism disintegrated world-wide and in Turkey because of the military coup it faced a political defeat. Nearly all Marxist movements were ruthlessly crushed by the military regime.

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In this situation, many Marxist militants were faced with a dilemma, namely the tension between the ultimate aim of Marxism which is a stateless and classless society, and the real-politic of Marxism (in order to achieve the ultimate aim Marxism argues that productive forces should be developed and the state should be preserved for this aim). This dilemma led many Marxist militants to reject the real-politic of Marxism and to seek ways to reach the ultimate aim of Marxism. This led many of them to anarchism.

On the other hand, in the darkness of the military coup years, left wing intelligentsia started to question Marxist collectivism and the Leninist understanding of organisation. They inquired into the contradiction between society and the individual. Their inquiries led many of them to individualism. From there some of them started to defend the "responsible individual". And they reached anarchism.

Publication of Kara

These groups and their discussions were represented and took their place in a new monthly publication called Yeni Olgu in these years. The publishing policy of Yeni Olgu was to create a political platform for the youth in the climax of the coup years. Although it was short lived one could say Yeni Olgu was successful in its attempt. The platform of Yeni Olgu helped to show many closed revolutionary circles that there were others who were thinking about the same problems. From this communication base, these circles exchanged ideas and theses.

This communication led to diversification and break away in some circles and communes but sometimes new communes and circles were also born. They were mainly diversified at the topics that were Feminism, Ecologism, anti-militarism. A few of them started to concern themselves with anarchist ideas and they started to express them.

The monthly magazine Akintiya Karsi was born from this source. Although one could not call it an anarchist magazine, it was basically an anti-authoritarian paper. After the publication of Akintiya Karsi, Sokak Publishing House was set up by ex-socialist militants who saw themselves as an anti-authoritarian line. The importance of Sokak Publishing House lies in the fact that it published the first book with a truly anarchist perspective in Turkey.

That was Ida Mett's Kronstadt 1921 in which she brings a new perspective to the Soviet Union and Stalin.

In 1986 some young members of Sokak Publishing House started to publish a new monthly magazine called Kara. At first Kara gathered little attention either from the general public or from left wing circles. In Kara on the one hand society was criticised for its understanding and practice of state, education and schooling and on the other hand the irresponsible individual of this society was also subjected to criticism for its attitude of standing by and watching things happen in society. Moreover this individual was subjected to the question

"Haven't you watched enough?" This radical attitude of Kara created an interest in some Marxist circles which were also discussing some of these issues in their closed circles. These circles did not see anarchism as negative but rather as a noble political theory not practical in reality. Even some members of these

circles were quite sympathetic towards anarchism. They greeted the emergence of anarchism in Turkey, whilst thinking that, it was not practical.

These people were the messengers of the first conversions of the Marxists to anarchism.

Kara's perspective influenced both the most aware of the Marxist militants and young new comers to the political arena of Turkey. The most perceptible difference of Kara from other leftists periodicals was that it did not praise the working class and it did not involve itself with daily politics. Instead it was radically attacking the institutions and general beliefs of society. Generally it was aiming to gather attention through these radical critics. It was probably a necessary thing to do at first, yet also this attitude could be viewed as insufficient or even some times it can be viewed as the wrong thing to do. However, this young

movement was in its infancy and it mostly needed to express its reasons for its existence and its own principles with this directness. Here because of this reason, it was far from expressing original ideas on daily politics of Turkey. Therefore it was expressing only general principles and they were short of daily politics for example, it was unable to express or develop an original perspective and to propose an original solution to the foremost political problem of Turkey that was (and is) the Kurdish national question. It stressed both the importance and necessity of the individual's responsibilities and the independence of the individual from society, yet it was unable to express ideas on the problem of organising these individuals around a political movement. Especially, it was not able to offer an alternative organisation model for ex-Marxist militants who suffered under the Leninist model of political organisation in those days in Turkey.

Kara ceased its existence in November 1987 after its 12th issue. In those days there was confusion and disorganisation among anarchist circles or communes (this was partly because the anarchist movement's supporters mainly consisted of students). After Kara ceased its publication, there appeared four autonomous groups from its remains. One of these groups started to publish a periodical that was called Efendisiz as a continuation of Kara. Efendisiz carried on what Kara tried to do till its closure in 1989. The other groups also tried to do things in their capacity and one of these created the Atolye A project that later started to publish Amargi a monthly magazine. As a result we could say the process of the

emergence of Kara and Efendisiz papers was the emergence of anarchism for first time in Turkey.

Amargi, Ates Hirsizi, Birey Yayinlari and Apolitica

Between 1989-1991 the anarchist movement did not have any periodical in Turkey. However, it does not mean that the anarchist movement lost interest among the people of Turkey. In fact rather the reverse was true. The interest in anarchism actually increased and as a result of this even non-anarchist publishing house started to publish books which were related to anarchism. For example, Metis Publishing House printed P. Avrich's Portrait of Anarchists and Anarchists in Russian Revolution.

The interest in anarchism and the culmination of the past five years of the anarchist movement brought new anarchist enterprises. The first of them was the Atolye A project.

Atolye A project with the contribution of the Association Against War set up the Amargi commune. This commune started to publish a new monthly anarchist publication called Amargi in 1992. One year later another anarchist publication started its publication life. That was called Ates Hirsizi and it was published by an anarchist circle from Istanbul. Also another anarchist circle created a Publishing House called Birey Yayinlari.

However these two anarchist periodicals Amargi and Ates Hirsizi had different perspectives from the beginning. Amargi mainly gave importance in its pages to the problem of peace, the dilemma of the individual - society contradiction and pacifism. On the other hand, Ates Hirsizi rather stressed the problem of social revolution, the Kurdish national question, and the problem of organisation. Moreover Ates Hirsizi discussed the problem of organisation in its relation to anarchist experience and the shortcomings and the wrongs of the anarchist organisations. Also Ates Hirsizi was basically against pacifism contrary to the Amargi commune and Amargi magazine.

In the summer of 1994 the Amargi circle proposed a collective publishing of a new monthly paper to all other anarchist circles on the condition that the differences between groups should be preserved. This project was discussed and with the co-operation of an anarchist group from Ankara, publishing of a new paper was agreed. According to the agreement the new paper should be mainly

concerned with daily politics in its pages. Yet Amargi left this project just after this agreement. Therefore, the new paper was prepared for publication by

the anarchist group from Ankara and by the members of Ates Hirsizi, an other anarchist periodical.

The new magazine is called Apolitica. Unfortunately, although it was intended as a daily politics magazine, it became a theoretical magazine. Its subjects have been mainly dominated by issues like the direction of the struggle and the form of the organisation. At the moment all the three periodicals that are mentioned above continue their publication in Turkey.

Lastly, anarchists first participated in the May Day celebrations with their black flag in 1993

in Istanbul and again in 1994, in Ankara and other places. Their presence created big interest in the media. The media gave special coverage to the anarchists and announced that "at last we have our anarchists".

The situation of the anarchist movement now in Turkey and its future

Turkey is a country that has the potential of important transformation dynamics. Although this dynamic nature of the people of Turkey has been ruthlessly repressed and has been intentionally attempted to be dismantled by the ruling classes during the 1980's, from time to time it has emerged again.

First of all, we could talk about the existence of a spontaneous and dynamic working class movement. Just three years ago, a massive march of the miners from Zonguldak to Ankara (the capital city of Turkey) created great panic in the ruling classes. Yet, since the demands of these actions are limited to the economic sphere, the ruling classes are able to control these actions in the end.

On the other hand, the Kurdish national movement is a determining factor in the political and daily life of Turkey. Actually, although it does not have proper coverage by the world media, there is a civil war going on in the south-east of Turkey where Kurdish people live. That is why, if one wants to do a revolutionary politics, one cannot ignore the Kurdish question.

However, the Kurdish national movement is lead by a nationalist and Stalinist leadership. It appears that Kurdish people in Turkey are determined to change the status quo of the country for their good. All the repression and the dirty war

of Turkey against the Kurdish people does not lead the ruling class of Turkey anywhere. Kurdish people resist all these. And it seems that they are going to find ways of winning this political and military war against the ruling classes of Turkey.

Moreover, there is another political factor that should be taken seriously. It is the radical Islamist movement. The military regime of the early 80's has intentionally promoted radical Islamist in the state apparatus for the purpose of eliminating all other forms of civil political groups and also for creating a new type of patriotism. Although this movement and its leaders are actually at the service of the ruling classes of Turkey, the masses choose this radical movement in order to show that they are against the ruthless capitalism which exists in Turkey. As it happens elsewhere in the world when the revolutionary fire is deflated, the masses often choose the reverse way against the system. From this point of view, we should try to understand the Islamic radicalism as a complex issue which is both an obstacle for the revolution and a signal of discontent of the masses from the system.

Further, left-wing groups are in major decline in Turkey. In 1996 (at the time of writing) the Social Democrats were in the coalition government with a centre right party (DYP), yet they are far from effective and they are rather a passive tool for DYP. Therefore, it seems that the masses do not expect anything from the Social Democrats anymore. Parallel to that the social democrats popularity is the lowest of all times. On the other hand Marxist left is in decline as it is all over the world. Some reformist Marxists attempted to revive the interest of the public, but they have not find enough support.

From http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/turkey/hist_turkey.html